

healthy
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learn



Children's
Health Fund



ZERO TO FOUR GUIDEBOOK

Understanding health issues during early childhood.
A guide for parents and caregivers.

HEALTHYANDREADYTOLEARN.ORG

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ASTHMA

Asthma is a lung disease that makes it hard to breathe. The tubes that move air to the lungs are called airways. During an asthma attack, the airways become narrow so less air can get in. Asthma is a chronic disease, which means that it does not go away.

Anyone can have asthma, but it is more common in children who have family members with asthma. Asthma is also common in children who have allergies and children who are around cigarette smoke.



SYMPTOMS

Some children have symptoms every day, while others only have symptoms a few times a year. Symptoms may come and go depending on the weather, a cold, allergies, or a child's age.

In babies and young children,

the main symptoms of asthma are wheezing and coughing. Wheezing is a high-pitched sound.

Other illnesses can also cause wheezing and coughing. If you think your child might have asthma, it is important to talk about it with a medical provider.

An asthma attack is when a child has trouble breathing. It is important to always have your child's asthma medicines with you. You won't always know when an asthma attack will happen.

Certain events or triggers may cause asthma symptoms. Some triggers are:

- Colds or other infections.
- Things that cause allergies like dust, pets, or pollen.
- Smoke.
- Strong emotional reactions, like crying.

With the right medicines, kids with asthma can live healthy, active lives.

ASTHMA: WHAT YOU CAN DO



It is important to keep track of your child's symptoms and know their triggers. If your child is having symptoms every day, or even a couple of times per week, that is too much.

Call your child's medical provider.



VISITING THE DOCTOR

If your child has wheezing or coughs a lot, take them to see their medical provider. The provider may ask a lot of questions. They may ask questions about whether other people in your family have asthma. They will probably ask you about your child's allergies, how often your child has trouble breathing, and how long it lasts.

HEALTHY VISION

Just like learning to walk and talk, babies get better at seeing slowly over 6 to 8 months.

As the brain grows, a baby learns how to use the information the eyes take in. Even before they learn to reach and grab with their hands and sit up, the eyes give information to the brain that is important for development.

Eye and vision problems in babies can delay:

- Motor skills, like rolling over and crawling.
- Fine motor skills, like moving fingers and picking up small items.
- Speech.



VISION STAGES

0 - 4
Months

Birth - 2 months:

- Baby's main focus is on objects 8 to 10 inches from their face.
- Sensitive to bright light.
- Baby's eyes don't work together and may appear to wander or to be crossed.

2 months:

- Baby begins to focus their eyes on the faces of people that are nearby.

3 months:

- Baby should begin to follow moving objects with their eyes and reach for things around them.

5 - 8
Months

5 months:

- Baby starts to be able to judge if something is close or far away.

After 6 months:

- Baby should no longer cross their eyes. If they do, go see your medical provider.

1 - 2
Years

- Children are interested in exploring everything around them. They like looking and listening. They recognize familiar items in books and can scribble with a crayon or pencil.

VISION: WHAT YOU CAN DO



Good vision comes from looking, touching, and exploring. In the first years of a child's life, let your child spend a lot of time playing with different toys and looking at many things. Say the names of objects as you walk around together.

Watch out for these signs:

- Your child does not follow an object with both eyes after 4 months.
- Your child has trouble moving either or both eyes in all directions.
- Your child's eyes jiggle and cannot hold still.
- Your child's eyes are crossed most of the time, or one or both of the eyes turn in or out after 6 months.
- Your child's pupils appear white, especially in photographs.
- Your child's eyes seem sensitive to light.

If your baby was born prematurely, they are at greater risk for certain eye problems. **Contact your medical provider for more information.**



VISITING FOR EYE EXAMS

It is important for a doctor to check a child's vision as they grow. If problems are found early, it is more likely that they can be treated.

DENTAL HEALTH

Healthy teeth are important to eating and overall health. Even though a child will eventually lose baby teeth, they are important.

Tooth decay is damage from germs and food that eat away at the tooth causing changes in color or even a hole. Tooth decay or cavities are the most common childhood diseases in the United States.



BABY TEETH

Teeth will start to break through your baby's gums usually between 6 and 12 months old. If your child doesn't have any teeth at 15 months of age, see your medical provider.

Baby teeth with cavities or infections can be painful and can even cause speech problems.

TEETHING

When your baby's teeth break through the gums, it may be uncomfortable and painful. This is called teething. Teething usually begins around 4 to 6 months of age. This may be because the tooth is moving below the gums.

Signs of teething are:

- Biting fingers or toys.
- Drooling.
- Sensitive or swollen gums.
- Problems sleeping.
- A higher body temperature (100.4 degrees or below).

If your baby has a fever (over 100.4 degrees) and is fussy, it is not just teething and you should talk to your child's medical provider.

You can help your baby feel better while teething:

- Use a clean finger to gently rub your baby's gum for a minute or two.
- Give your baby soft objects to chew on, such as teething rings.
- Talk to your baby's medical provider about using pain medication like acetaminophen or ibuprofen.



Do not use teething medicines with belladonna or benzocaine that have serious side effects or teething necklaces that can cause choking.

DENTAL: WHAT YOU CAN DO



Tooth Brushing:

- As soon as baby teeth appear, brush your baby's teeth using a baby-size toothbrush and a small drop of baby toothpaste (the size of a grain of rice).
- Brush your baby's teeth twice a day. Once in the morning and once right before bedtime.
- When your child is 3 years old, increase the amount of toothpaste to the size of a pea.

Healthy Habits:

- Do not put your baby to sleep with a bottle. When the baby falls asleep, the milk will stay in their mouth and can cause tooth decay.
- Switch your baby from a bottle to a cup as soon as they are ready to hold it on their own. Do not let your child use a bottle past 1 year of age.
- Provide healthy foods and limit snacks and drinks that have a lot of sugar.



VISITING THE DENTIST

As soon as your baby's first tooth appears, it is time to make a dentist appointment. The first visit is mainly for the dentist to examine your baby's mouth and to check growth and development.

HEALTHY HEARING

Hearing is an important part of a child's social, emotional, and brain development.

Hearing loss can happen when a part of the ear is not working the right way. It may even cause a child to have problems with talking. Hearing is tested in the hospital when a baby is born.



HEARING STAGES

0 - 3
Months

- React to loud sounds.
- Recognize a parent's voice.
- Make cooing noises.
- Make other sounds.

4 - 6
Months

- Follow sounds with their eyes.
- Respond to changes in the tone of a voice.
- Notice toys that make sounds.
- Pay attention to music.
- Laugh.
- Babble or make gurgling sounds.

7 - 12
Months

- Enjoy playing peek-a-boo and pat-a-cake.
- Turn and look in the direction of sounds.
- Listen when spoken to.
- Babble to get attention.
- Practice different speech sounds.
- By a child's first birthday, they should have one or two words ("hi", "dog", "dada", "mama").

**12 - 18
Months**

- Know parts of the body and point when asked.
- Follow simple commands and understand simple questions.
- Enjoy simple songs, stories, and rhymes.
- Point to pictures in books.
- Learn new words.
- Put two or more words together.
- Use words that start with many different letters.

2 years

- Use 2 or 3 word phrases to talk about and ask for things.
- Speak in a way that is mostly understood by family members.
- Name objects.

3 years

- Hear you when you call from another room.
- Answer simple questions such as “who?” “what?” “where?” and “why?”.
- Talk about activities at daycare, preschool, or friends’ homes.
- Use sentences with 4 or more words.
- Speak easily without having to repeat sounds or words.

HEARING: WHAT YOU CAN DO



It is important to recognize the signs of hearing loss as early as possible.

Early signs of problems can be: no reaction to loud noises or no response to your voice.

If you suspect a problem, see your medical provider right away.

Watch out for these signs:

- Late to begin speaking as a child.
- Does not speak clearly.
- Does not follow directions (you may think they are not paying attention or just ignoring you).
- Often says, “Huh?”.
- Turns the TV volume up too high.
- No reaction to loud noises.
- Shows no response to your voice.
- Complains of earaches, ear pain, or head noises.

The signs and symptoms of hearing loss are different for each child.

HEALTHY EATING



Eating well gives your child the energy to grow, learn, and play.

Some foods are healthier than others, so choices are important.



HEALTHY EATING STAGES

0 - 3
Months

- Breastmilk or formula provide everything your baby needs.
- After the first few weeks, babies will start to feed less often and sleep for longer periods of time.

4 Months
-
1 Year

4 - 6 months:

Most babies are ready to start eating solid foods.

How can you tell if a baby is ready for solid food:

- Can hold head up.
- Opens mouth when food is nearby.
- Can take food from a spoon and swallow it.

9 months - 1 year:

Babies pick up food in their fingers and may try feeding themselves. They can also begin trying foods with different textures and tastes.

1 - 2
Years

- Toddlers feed themselves, first with their fingers and then with forks and spoons.
- Parents decide what type of foods to offer at mealtime, toddlers decide which of these foods to eat and how much.
- Avoid feeding your toddler foods they could choke on:
 - Popcorn.
 - Hot dogs.
 - Hard fruits.
 - Whole grapes.
 - Raisins.
 - Nuts.
- Limit the amount of cow's milk or juice you offer your toddler. They can make your child feel full but don't have the nutrition toddlers need.

**2 - 4
Years**

- Eat different kinds of healthy foods to get all the vitamins they need to grow.
- At this age, children can begin to help make meals. For example, they can tear lettuce for a salad or help set the table. Having family meals and a daily routine are important for young children.



HEALTHY EATING: WHAT YOU CAN DO



Offer different types of healthy foods.

- Fresh fruits.
- Vegetables.
- Dairy products (milk, yogurt, cheese).
- Protein (beans, chicken, turkey, fish, hamburger, tofu, eggs).
- Whole grain cereals.
- Bread.

Let your child choose the portion.

- Help your children choose their own serving size. Give them smaller plates, bowls, and cups for their food. Young children may not eat everything that is on their plate, and that is okay.

Have regular mealtimes with the family.

- When it is meal or snack time, turn off the TV, put away phones and tablets, and eat together at the table.

Limit sugary drinks.

- Young children should not drink many sugary drinks. This includes soda, juice, lemonade, sweet tea, or sports drinks. The best drinks are water and milk.

Teach table manners.

- Teach children how to hold a spoon or fork and use a knife. They can also learn not to talk with full mouths, and how to ask for food that is not next to them.



VISITING A MEDICAL PROVIDER

Children should regularly go to their medical provider to make sure they are healthy. During a check-up, medical staff will check on your child's weight, height, and diet. They can also help you find services which help with how to find, choose, and cook healthy foods for you and your child.

LEAD

Lead is a metal that can be dangerous. Lead was used in paint and water pipes in homes built before the 1970s. Sometimes lead is found in dirt and in toys, pottery, and herbal medicines made outside of the United States. Dust from lead paint is the most common source of lead poisoning in children.

Lead is harmful to everyone, but babies and young children are at greatest risk for health problems from lead poisoning. Children ages 6 months to 3 years are most likely to be exposed to lead. They spend a lot of time on the floor and try to put things in their mouths. This makes them more likely to swallow lead dust.

Lead can have hurt 's:ects o:

- Growth.
- Behavior.
- Ability to learn.



LEAD: WHAT YOU CAN DO



Test your home for lead.

- Ask the landlord about lead before you sign a lease. If the apartment or home was built before 1978, get it tested for lead.

Wash hands.

- Wash your child's hands with soap and water after playing, especially before eating. This will get rid of lead dust. Wash your children's toys often, especially toys that they put in their mouths.

Test your tap water.

- You can ask your landlord to test the tap water, or you can find kits to do it yourself at most drug stores. Lead can be found in older pipes.

Use a water filter for drinking water.

- You can buy water pitchers which remove lead out from tap water. You can also get filters that attach to the faucet to remove lead.

Use cold water for drinking and cooking.

- It is a good idea to use only cold water from the tap for drinking and cooking. Hot water is more likely to have higher amounts of lead.

Pottery.

- Don't use glazed pottery for cooking or serving food.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH

Social and emotional development is when children learn:

- To connect with others.
- To build healthy relationships.
- To manage their feelings.

A child's first relationships help shape who they are, who they become, and how they understand the world. Children who are emotionally healthy have good relationships with adults and children their age.



STAGES OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

0 - 3
Months

1 month:

- Begin to make eye contact.
- Cry for help.
- Respond to a parent's smile or voice.

2 months:

- Study faces, gurgles, and "coo" in response to sounds.
- Prefer to look at people rather than objects.
- Smile.

3 months:

- Get your attention by smiling and gurgling.
- Smiling and gurgling back at you.
- Copy movements and faces you make.

Many parents worry about spoiling their babies during the first months. The way you care for your baby at an early age can affect how they grow up. Teach your baby and young child that they are growing up in a safe, loving environment.

You can do this by responding when they cry, giving them what they need, and comforting them **whenever** they need it. This will make them less likely to have behavior problems when they're older. **Remember, you can't spoil a baby.**

STAGES OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

4 - 6 Months

As they learn to sit up, use their hands, and move around, babies become more interested in the outside world.

4 - 5 months:

- Laugh when tickled.
- Be interested in other babies.
- Begin to tell the difference between family members.

6 months:

- Begin to know their own name.
- “Coo” when happy.
- Make grunting and squealing noises.



Sometimes it can feel strange for your baby to explore your face or reach for your things, but it's not because they are “being greedy” or trying to take things from you. This is how they learn.

7 - 12 Months

10 months:

- Begin to have self-esteem.
- Respond to positive sounds such as clapping.
- Begin to show moods such as sad, happy, or angry.
- May also begin to recognize themselves when looking in mirrors.

12 months:

- May have temper tantrums.
- Have a sense of humor.
- May cling to one parent more than the other.



During these months, your baby may begin to worry when left with strangers, babysitters, or even other family members. Your baby is more likely to have worry about being left or have separation anxiety when tired, hungry, or sick.

**1 - 2
Years**

- Switch between wanting to do things themselves and clinging to parents.
- Will come to you for comfort, especially when tired, sick, or scared.
- Begin to talk using words and sounds.
- Recognize people they know.
- Play and talk with others.

**2 - 3
Years**

- Your child will want to try and do things on their own, but may not be able to. When your baby can't do something, they might get mad.
- Play and talk more with others.

**3 - 4
Years**

- May start preschool.
- Will begin to look for other kids to play with.
- May not understand how to share or take turns.
- Start to play dress up, or play pretend.
- Show understanding of others' feelings.

4 Years

- Want to be part of a group.
- Learn to share and cooperate more with others.
- Give hugs and kisses.
- Will be more friendly, curious, and talk more.
- Will start to do more things themselves, like dressing, feeding, and putting away toys.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH: WHAT YOU CAN DO



It is important for you to have a close connection with your child.

- In the early months, you can do this by quickly responding to your baby's needs. As your child gets older, you can grow close to them by playing, comforting, and talking with them.

Talking and reading with your child is a great way to connect.

- Hearing more words causes your child's brain to grow. It is important to talk with them, even before they can understand what the words mean. Talk to them while you are together. Describe what you are doing, and point out things that you see.

Playing and smiling at your child is important.

- This is how they learn to understand other people's emotions. It is also important to look them in the eye.

The more secure your child feels, the more confident and well-behaved they will be.

- If you praise your child when they make good choices, they know to repeat those choices. As you continue to do this, your child will start to feel good about those choices and about themselves.



VISITING A MEDICAL PROVIDER

Your child's medical provider can help you if there are problems with your child's social and emotional development. You should not be embarrassed. All children are different. Helping your child makes you a good parent.

SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL HEALTH: WARNING SIGNS

If you notice the signs below, you may want to talk to your child's medical provider.

9 Months:

- Is not responding to sounds.
- Is not smiling.
- Avoids being close to you or cuddling.
- Cannot calm themselves.
- Does not want to play games like peek-a-boo.

1 Year:

- Does not want to play with other children their age.
- Becomes very upset when daily activities are changed.
- Makes no or short eye contact with others.
- Does not copy things you do.
- Does not respond when you call their name.
- Does not follow when you point to something.
- Does not take turns in a game like chase or peek-a-boo.

2 Years:

- Does not copy things other people do.
- Moves quickly from one activity to another and is not able to stay at an activity for even short times.
- Does not show any interest in other children.
- Does not "show" things to other people.
- Becomes very upset when daily activities are changed.
- Is passive, and doesn't want to try things other children their age are doing.
- Cannot wait for things they want.

3 Years:

- Is not interested in playing pretend.
- Always has a very hard time separating from you.
- Does not reach out or respond to other children.
- Has fears that cause problems with daily activities.
- Gets very upset when daily activities are changed.

4 Years:

- Is not able to join in play with other children.
- Is not able to share at all.
- Wants you to do everything for them.
- Becomes very upset when things are changed.
- Has a very hard time separating from you.
- Is scared to try things other children their age are doing.
- Has fears that cause problems with daily activities.



TRAUMA AND STRESS

Trauma is a very scary or upsetting event or a group of events that changes how a person reacts to stress. These types of events make people feel afraid or in danger even once the scary event has passed.

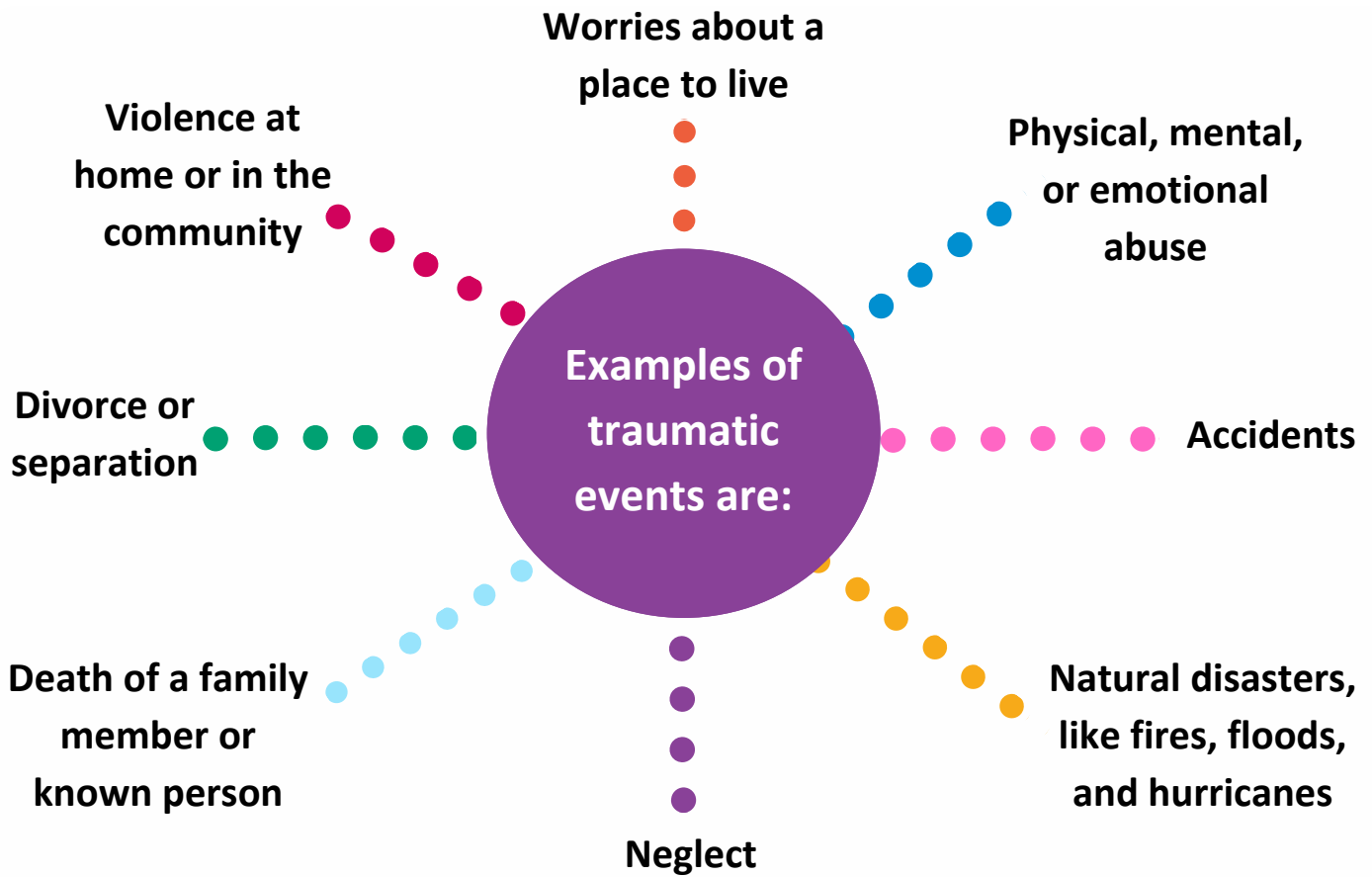
Trauma can happen before a baby is born (inside the womb) or as children are growing up. Although you may not be able to prevent some traumatic events, there are ways to support children who have been through trauma.

The effects of trauma can be very different for different people.

Two children in the same family may have very different effects from a trauma they both lived through.



Trauma can be caused when your child lives through one of these events, or sees it happen to someone else.



WHY IS TRAUMA IMPORTANT

When a child has gone through trauma, they may have trouble dealing with some events or situations for the rest of their life.

Trauma can change a child's behavior:

- How they relate to other people.
- The way they react to everyday events.
- Health problems as they become an adult.

The effects of trauma can be very different for different people. Children do better if they receive help and support from adults - **the earlier the better!**

TRAUMA AND STRESS: WHAT YOU CAN DO



There are many things that you can do to help a child with stress or trauma:

Give your child a safe place to go to when they feel overwhelmed.

Stay calm and listen to your child.

Do the same activities every day to make your child feel safe.

- Try doing the same things every day while getting ready for school, around mealtimes, and before bed.

Create a community of support so that your child knows there are people they can go to if they need help.

- Your community of support includes teachers, family members, neighbors, medical providers, etc.

Look for things that cause your child to become upset.

- Triggers are events and reminders of scary things that cause your child to get upset.

Most children will be okay after traumatic experiences.

One of the best ways that children can heal is with constant support from you to make them feel safe, secure, and protected.

TRAUMA AND STRESS: TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF

Caring for a child with trauma can be stressful and tiring. It is important that you take care of yourself during this time.

This can be done by:

- Eating regularly.
- Getting enough sleep.
- Exercising.
- Spending time with people you trust.
- Talking with a counselor.



Sometimes it is very hard to know if a baby's behavior is part of normal development or caused by stress.

Talk to your medical provider whenever you have questions or concerns. Your worry and stress are also important.

DEVELOP AND GROW WITH PLAY

Birth - 4 Months:

- Keep toys within your baby's focus (about 8 to 12 inches).
- Talk to your baby as you walk around the room.
- Have toys with different textures, sizes, weights, and shapes.
- Read books with your baby.

5 - 8 Months:

- Give your baby lots of time to play and explore on the floor.
- Read books with your baby.
- Hang a mobile across the crib for your baby to grab, pull, kick, and look at.
- Give your baby plastic or wooden blocks that they can hold.
- Play patty cake or peek-a-boo and move your baby's hands while singing.
- Use simple words and sentences about clothing, food, toys, and each other.

9 - 11 Months:

- Play hide and seek games with toys.
- Name objects when talking.
- Help your baby try to crawl.
- Place objects on a highchair tray that can be pushed off and dropped to the floor.
- Read books and tell stories to your baby.

12 - 18 Months:

- Roll a ball back and forth to help your child follow objects.
- Give your child building blocks and balls of all shapes and sizes.
- Read books and tell stories to your child.
- Play pretend with telephones, stuffed animals, and dolls.

DEVELOP AND GROW WITH PLAY

19 - 24 Months:

- Play with toys that can be put together or taken apart.
- Have your child make up stories.
- Read books with your child.
- Play with toys that have wheels.

2 - 3 Years:

- Ask your child to run, tumble, and climb.
- Give your child lots of time to make things and draw.
- Play pretend with dolls, dress-up clothes, or story telling.
- Read books with your child.
- Talk about objects, colors, and shapes.
- Allow your child to play with other children about the same age.



3 - 4 Years:

- Allow time for drawing, coloring, and activities with clay and play dough.
- Read books with your child.
- Ask your child to throw, stop/go, and turn sharp corners.
- Set up times to play in small groups.
- Tell stories and talk to your child.

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